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RANDOM VERSES



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BY
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HENRY H. HARPER**

WITH HUMBLE APOLOGIES TO
CALLIOPE AND OTHER MUSES
WHO INHABIT THE PRECINCTS
OF PARNASSUS

THE TROUBLES OF OUR UNCLE SAM

Rare wisdom marked our fathers' toil
Who sought with freedom's right
To crown a free-born infant's soil —
Exempt from Sovereign's might.
When Uncle Sam, in cradle robes,
Nursed at the breast of liberty,
He little dreamed what cares and woes
Awaited his maturity.

At first with slow, unsteady tread
Young Samuel groped his way.
He shed his outward coat of red,
And dressed in blue and gray;
But when the boy to manhood grew
With long gray whiskers on his chin,
His colors didn't harmonize,
So strife and Civil War set in.

His homespun garments wide were rent—
Alas for Uncle's cheer!

His children seemed on trouble bent—
He mourned o'er many a bier.

The members of his mixed household
He found it hard to unify;
And thus his troubles, once begun,
Have never ceased to multiply.

His gates were opened wide to all
From every foreign shore,
And millions answered to the call,
Then echoed back for more.

And thus his infant progeny
Increased and more discordant grew,
Until his homogeneous band
Became a heterogeneous crew.

His workmen wail with all their might,
Rehearsing varied ills;
And when they ballot for their “right”
They vote against their mills.

The cause from whence their hunger comes
Then simple-mindedly they seek,
And wonder why their factories
Are closed three days of every week.

Our vaunted freedom, once proclaimed
By our colonial sires,
Has nurtured strife and vice, inflamed
By greed and vain desires.
The land of cradled liberty—
Where U. S. sought his brood to raise
Becomes a common feeding ground
Where Elephants and Donkeys graze.

On everything that profit yields
These pesky brutes will feed:
The factories, railroads, mills and fields
Are victims of their greed.
These industries which once were owned
By prosperous men of honored name
Are turned into a sporting park
Where politicians hunt for fame.

The servants of his vast household
Employ his time and wealth
In persecuting young and old
Accused of “business stealth.”
His thrifty children pay the toll
That’s spent to kill their enterprise,
And feel the whip and sting of law
Responsive to their mournful cries.

Alas for Uncle's peace of mind!
His troubles grow apace;
His bank account is 'way behind,
And care-lines mark his face.
His hapless children cry for bread,
But when they reach the tradesman's shop
This dismal placard greets their eyes:
"No bread to sell, no wood to chop!"

And when into his field he strays
To seek a breath of air
He finds that melancholy days
Are present, even there.
The Jack-ass and the Elephant
Repose serenely in the shade
Wondering why the grass won't grow
Upon the beaten paths they made.

There's one sure cure for all his ills —
This Uncle Sam of ours —
And this would open all the mills
In less than twenty hours;
If fair Columbia he'd wed
And o'er his household give her sway,
His former troubles then would be
As starlight to a sunny day.

THE CONSCIENCE OF DEACON LEE

My name with letters three I spell—
Two e's preceded by an L—
They call me *Deacon* Lee
Because I've chiefly spent my life
Eschewing evil ways and strife
To keep my conscience free.

My first adventure was in trade
Wherein a fortune soon I made—
But that was years ago,
When politics was filled with grime
And great success was not a crime
With heinousness aglow.

Ten thousand men I once employed
And happy times they all enjoyed
Amid prosperity.
When lo! some politician found
My business plans did not abound
With Christian piety!

“All right,” said I, “I’ve no desire
To stir up any Christian’s ire.

Though business be my pride,
And though ten thousand feel the sting,
My conscience — tender-hearted thing!
In rectitude must bide.”

A goodly while I searched in vain
For some vocation free from stain

Where profits would be nil;
But everything, to my disgust,
Was owned by some gigantic trust,
With overflowing till.

I tried collecting prints and books,
And fell an easy prey to crooks.

I joined a hobby club;
But when my fate got noised about
They raised the deus and kicked me out—
They said I was a *cub*!

To poetry I turned my hand
And praised the laws of this free land;
But critics only scoff
And said such silly sentiments
Gave undisputed evidence
Of brains both scant and soft.

I wrote a novel, free from vice,
To sell at half the usual price
 To meet the public need;
But couldn't sell a single book,
Because, they said, I quite mistook
 The taste of those who read.

At length an altruistic fake
Besought me his advice to take
 And get some land to till.
"If pleasure be your bent," said he,
"A gentleman farmer you should be;
 For there you'll get your fill."

He told me that the farmer's life
Is free from care and void of strife;
 That every plant and bird
Would bloom and sing with gratitude
And silence every fretful mood
 That business cares bestirred.

He said there's luck in honey bees,
That money's made on apple trees,
 That chickens pay you well.
The villain! how he lied! He must
Have owned stock in a chicken trust,
 Or had a farm to sell.

I bought a farm and tried it out.
I suffered not with chronic gout, —
 But other ailments worse, —
My conscience smote me when I killed
The pests with which the place was filled —
 It drew upon my purse.

My farm I sold for half its cost —
Reckoning not the time I lost
 In fighting bugs and pests.

The crime that broke my tender heart
And made my guilty conscience smart
 Was robbing chickens' nests.

The day that I got back to town
I met an ambulating clown
 Who hailed me on the street
With quip and jest anent the farm;
“What fool,” he asked with feigned alarm,
 “Has bought your country seat!”

He said that farming was too tame;
That I should learn a high-toned game
 And join a Country Club.
In golf, he said, I'd make a hit,
So off I went and bought a kit,
 And there began the rub.

A caddy on the links I found,
And asked him what he'd charge a round—
"It's fifty cents," said he;
But when my golfing form he saw,
And heard me cuss, he said, "Haw, haw!
I'll caddy for ye free!"

And when the final hole was played
We figured up the score I made—
It seemed to be a joke;
For when the total sum I read
The caddy smiled and calmly said:
"Ye must of *missed* a stroke."

I played the game a month or more
And never made a decent score.
"You're off your game!" they cried.
My ball found every ditch and rut,—
I couldn't drive, approach or put,
No matter how I tried.

The balls that cost me fifty cents
Would lose themselves behind the fence
Or in some grassy plot,
And every time the game I'd play
My conscience taxed me double pay
For all the fun I got.

“No more for me this costly hoax
That spoils the minds of gentle folks;
I’ll try some other game.”
I sought to teach religious views,
But only preached to empty pews,
For not a sinner came!

I couldn’t do a cussed thing
That fame unto my name would bring
Or any pleasure give.
Salvation Army ranks I tried,
But even there I was denied —
So what’s the use to live!

I tried committing suicide
And took a pint of cyanide,
But luck was just the same;
The devil said he had no use
For such a silly, worthless goose,
So back to earth I came.

Now having vainly tried all things
To keep my conscience free from stings,
I made a public speech
And pledged my life (but not my cash)
That every pesky trust I’d smash
That came within my reach.

The public howled and danced with joy,
And yelled, "Hurray for you! Good boy!"

You're just the man we need.

The politicians we have had
Are all protective tariff mad,

Or else they've gone to seed.

"We want a man who'll make things hum
And put big business on the bum

With great celerity;

To make the halls of Congress ring
And interfere with everything

That spells prosperity."

Success in politics, I find,
Is gained by being true and kind,
And making moral codes

For overweening trusts that rob
The lazy loafer of his job

By enterprising modes.

Election morn dawned clear and bright;
I won the great and glorious fight

For "honest government."

With fiery speeches by the score
To right the people's wrongs galore,

To Washington I went.

And now I hope I'll *never* die;
For all the rich men I defy
 And tell them what to do.
Of Satan's wrath I'm not afraid,
Because he loves the laws I've made—
 Indeed, he loves me too.

In politics I've found my goal;
Now sleeps my conscientious soul
 In realms of peace sublime;
My heart is filled with gratitude,
I live upon the finest food,
 And have a *corking* time.

P. S. And the public pays the bills!

THE "WAR-TAX"

The baker to the banker sent
A bumping baker's bill;
The banker to the baker went,
That baker man to kill;
But when he asked him why he charged
So much for buns, the baker said:
"The war-tax hits me very hard,—
I had to raise the price of bread."

The tailor to the banker sent
(With supplicating note),
A bill for patching up a rent
In Mr. Banker's coat.
The banker cried, "I'm robbed again!
The sum would buy a ready-made!"
"Not so," the tailor man replied,
"War tax, you know, must now be paid."

The butcher to the banker sent
A four weeks' bill for meat—
On which he credited the rent
Due on his business seat.

“Heigh-ho! how's this!” the banker cried,
“Your rent don't pay my butcher's bill!”
“Not this month, Bill,” the butcher said,
“The war tax hit the sausage mill.”

“War tax, bedamned!” the banker shouts,
“You fellows are all wrong;
We're not with anyone at outs—
Why give us such a song?
You're all obsessed with this idea;
It's only a sham make-belief:
The ship of state is on the rocks;
This 'War Tax' is for her relief.

“The captain, mates and all the crew
Just while the days away,
And lounge about and smoke and chew
Till time to draw their pay.
Then direful outcries rend the air
And wake the watchmen on the land—
“‘We're stranded here! We've run amuck!
For God's sake, won't you lend a hand?’”

The butcher scowled, and seemed to think;
Then shouted he aloud—
“I’d let the cusses stay and sink;
They’re a hard, reckless crowd.
If they don’t know the rocks and shoals,
They have no business sailing boats.
Now when they get themselves in wrong,
They holler ‘help’—and we’re the goats.”

“That may be so,” said banker Drew,
“But how about our freight?
If woe betide that spendthrift crew,
No less will be our fate.
The precious cargo in their care
Is not from loss or theft insured.
They get the ride— we pay the fare,
And lose the cargo, ship and steward.”

The banker paid the bills he owed,
Without another kick;
Then to his borrowers he showed
A clever business trick.
Their interest rates increased by half—
How they did howl, and “Robber!” cry!
He calmly stroked his chin and said,
“War tax, you know, makes money high.”

THE BIBLIOPHILE'S EMPYREAL DREAM

There's many a speculation rife
About empyreal scenes of life
 And treasures in the skies,
And many creeds of doubtful worth
 Do learned men devise
To teach us how to live and die
 That we again may rise.

But ne'er can mortal man unfold
The mysteries which the grave doth hold.
 No soul has e'er returned
To earth with news from Pluto's Hall;
 And saints who crowns have earned
To glorify their names in Heaven
 Are there fore'er interned.

The wisest men content must be
Until their souls from earth set free
 Shall seek their final goal.
On Freedom's wing to heights unknown
 Ascends the righteous soul —
No Charon's Ferryboat from it
 Collects a final toll!

But wrongs committed in the flesh
Will hold the soul in deadly mesh
Until the heavens fall,
And hours like ages shall appear
To those beyond recall
Among the ghoulish shades and imps
In Pluto's massive Hall.

The usurer his place shall find
Among the heathens of his kind
In Satan's hardest bed.
The victims of his earthly greed
Who once he thought were dead
Will make him dream of discontent —
Of coals upon his head.

Enshrouded in eternal night,
He'll long for some phosphoric light
To drive away the ghosts.
And in his hours of broken sleep
Amid these gruesome hosts
He'll dream of rents and int'rest due
While on the grill he roasts.

The bibliophile whose life is spent
In righteous acts and good intent —
To every man a friend —

Will find that dreams of endless bliss
 Await his journey's end;
Where with his gathered kin he'll hear
 The gladsome praise ascend.

Among his books, in that dream-land,
This happy saint shall proudly stand
 In unalloyed delight;
While jealous hosts with beaming eyes
 Will marvel at the sight
Of *untrimmed* books in grand array
 Displayed in heavenly light.

They'll wish that they with equal zest
And bookish instincts had been blest;
 That while in earthly state
They too had wisely garnered stores
 Of gems with which to bait
The hooks of Envy for the saints
 Within the Pearly Gate.

WAR

The wheels of progress backward roll,
And war with all its sacred toll
 Fills every human breast
With morbid thoughts and dreadful fears.
 The war-lord's iron chest,
Replenished at the public cost,
In lieu of guaranteeing peace
 Becomes the nation's pest.

The war god in a peaceful age
With blood inscribes on history's page
 A chapter of disgrace:
A warrior prince takes up his sword
 And then with upturned face
Bespeaks Jehovah's helping hand
To guide him in the glorious work
 Of trampling down a race.

Assured of Providential aid
He bids his henchmen start the raid,
 While he remains to pray
And decorate with iron cross
 The sons he sent away.
But naught must stay their evil hand,
No treaty rights must they respect,
 Nor nations' laws obey.

The sacred shrines and stately domes
And noncombatants' peaceful homes
 Are plied with torch and shell—
Will God condone the vandal act
 By which these temples fell,
Because they stood athwart the way
That led through towns on neutral soil
 To some great citadel?

The savage from his jungle shade
Looks out upon this wierd parade
 And marvels at the sight
Of marching hordes with torch and sword
 Who plunder day and night
And desecrate their neighbors' homes
And burn their sacred altars down
 To demonstrate their might.

The neutral nations stand aghast
And wonder how such scenes can last
 In this enlightened age;
And who will pay the reckoning
 Of such a bold outrage
Upon the lives and homes and lands
Of helpless victims, when the crime
 Has reached its final stage.

But gods of vengeance lie in wait,
And when the verdict on their slate
 Proclaims the awful toll
A heavy tax will be assessed
 Upon the guilty soul
Who engineered the murderous hosts
That ravaged peaceful homes and lands
 To gain their coveted goal.

A hapless wretch, a homeless lad,
In squalor bred, with hunger mad,
 Steals but a crust or bone,
And Justice weeps, and cries aloud
 From her exalted throne:
“Attire the wretch in stripes and chains
And cast him in a dungeon cell!
 For bread, give him a stone!”

A haughty prince with crownèd head,
Of Teuton blood, on manna fed,
A million lives destroys;
He burns the temples of the gods
And stirs the world with noise—
While Justice, blinded by the glare
Sits meekly in her easy chair
With tightly bandaged eyes.

FAME

I sauntered here and there about
Within the vast white Hall of Fame,
And as with staring eyes I read
Inscriptions underneath each name,
And gazed at naked statues there
Of valorous men with genius fraught,
I trembled not that my nude form
In marble wrought would e'er be sought
For curious crowds to gaze upon.

Few there be who fame inherit,
Thousands vainly strive to win it,
Some acquire, but never use it,
Others find, and then they lose it;
Egotistic men abuse it,
Roosevelt gunned until he shot it.
Did ever mortal man refuse it?
But why the thunderation is it
That wives of writers never prize it?

BROTHERHOOD

From whence I came upon this sphere of mould
Or what my destination is beyond,
Are secrets locked within a sacred fold
Whose door to mortal key will ne'er respond.

Nor would I waste my Master's precious time
In seeking these forbidden things to learn.
May God preserve me from the shiftless crime
Of meddling in affairs of His concern.

'Tis better, far, that I should seek to know
What work befits the talents I employ—
That on some hapless soul I may bestow
A kindly act that gives some earthly joy.

For everyone, our God some task has planned,
And be our given bounty large or small,
In readiness He bids his soldiers stand,
Prepared for quick response to duty's call.

The tares and pests that in the garden thrive,
By faithful husbandmen are weeded out;
The woes and cares with which God's people strive,
By Christian brotherhood are put to rout.

As warming sunbeams cheer a wintry morn,
So friendly smiles and tender words will bring
Faith, hope and cheer to human hearts forlorn,
And thus cheat sorrow of its wonted sting.

Beware, all men, the pious hypocrite
Who masks himself with sanctimonious face!
Who talks of naught but faith and Holy Writ,
And seeks to purify the human race.

His ostentatious prayers his grief express,
That all mankind in sinful ways persist;
Yet no ill-fated brother's sore distress
Will aid or sympathy from him enlist.

The man who shares his meagre crust of bread
With some poor waif bereft of friend and home,
Will reap a richer blessing on his head
Than he whose name adorns a gilded dome.

THE SOUL'S RESPONSE

With tear-dimmed eyes and heavy heart
I look upon thy placid face
Bereft of lifelike hue:

Thine eyes are closed, thy voice is still,
And as I view those silent lips
Sealed in eternal sleep
I ponder Fate's unkind decree
That you and I so soon must part!

But as I raise my weeping eyes
To Him who gave thy love to me
And plead for strength to bear
The burden that thy loss entails,
He seems to bid me turn again

And view thy sweet repose,—
When lo! upon thy lips there plays
A smile reflected from the skies.

A gleam of heavenly light I see
Transmitted through thy peaceful face—
My heart with hope revives!
My soul awakes! My grief subsides!
Why, loved one, should I seek to bring
Thee back to earthly cares,
When Death is but a tranquil dream
In which thou hast preceded me!

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